Capitol Visitor Center Fact Sheet — January 2004

Background: The U.S. Capitol and its stately dome have become the international symbols of our representative democracy. As the nation has grown in size and complexity, the Capitol has responded with architectural additions and technological advances.

Artist's rendering of the entrance to the Capitol Visitor Center from First Street SE.

As the number of visitors to the Capitol has grown from 1 million in 1970 to 3 million in 2000, Congress recognized the need for better visitor amenities and accessibility, improved provisions for safety and security, and better opportunities for citizens to learn about their Congress and their Capitol.

Responding to these needs, Congress directed the Architect of the Capitol to design and construct a new visitor center that would welcome visitors to the Capitol in an atmosphere of free and open access. Since its inception, the design for the Capitol Visitor Center has been guided by four fundamental goals:

1. Security – The Visitor Center will provide a secure public environment in which to welcome and manage a large number of visitors while protecting the Capitol Building and its occupants.

2. Visitor Education – The Visitor Center will establish and present lively and informative programs on the workings and history of the Congress, the legislative process, and the architecture of the Capitol.

3. Visitor Comfort – The Visitor Center will provide the amenities, comfort, and convenience for visitors appropriate to the world's most recognizable symbol of representative democracy and one of the nation's most visited tourist destinations. In addition, all its spaces and resources will be fully accessible to persons with disabilities.

4. Functional Improvements – The Visitor Center will respond to the physical limitations of the Capitol by providing modern, efficient facilities for such functions as truck loading and deliveries, improved connections to the Senate and House office buildings, and improvements to vertical circulation, including new elevators.

Capitol Visitor Center Facts:

- The Visitor Center encompasses 580,000 square feet on three levels below ground and includes 170,000 square feet for House and Senate expansion space.
- The project footprint covers 5 acres (approximately 193,000 square feet) and is larger than the footprint of the Capitol building.
- Excavation, nearly complete as of January 2004, required the removal of 50,000 truckloads of soil.
- The perimeter foundation wall includes 2,100 linear feet of slurry wall and 494 tie-backs.
- The structure will be supported by 135 steel columns and 50 concrete columns. Steel columns weigh as much as 20 tons each.
- A 27-inch-thick roof deck will be capped with granite pavers that match the historic Frederick Law Olmsted hardscape features, such as granite fountains and seatwalls.
- Inside, the CVC will feature:
  - a **Great Hall**, which will include information and ticketing desks, and provide a spacious area where visitors can gather while viewing the Capitol Dome through grand skylights;
  - a large **Exhibition Gallery** that will tell the dual story of the development of representative democracy and the building of the Capitol;

- two **Orientation Theaters**, which will present a specially-produced introductory film that will prepare visitors for their tour of the Capitol;
- a new **Dining Facility** with a capacity for 600 people;
- two new **25-passenger elevators** from the Visitor Center into the Capitol, which will greatly improve accessibility within the Capitol as well;
- **gift shops**, which will sell Capitol, House and Senate souvenirs;
- 26 restrooms, including 10 "family" restrooms, and
- a l,000-linear-foot, two-lane truck tunnel that will connect to eight loading dock bays at the service level on the north side of the project area.

- **Historic Preservation:** The CVC design has, to the extent possible, preserved the historic East Capitol Grounds designed in 1874 by renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who also designed Central Park in New York City. More trees will be planted than will be removed and the grand views of the Capitol Dome will be restored along gently sloping and curving pathways leading visitors graciously to the CVC entrances. All of the historic "hardscape" features, including lanterns, fountains and retaining walls, have been carefully removed and are being stored and restored as necessary. Each landscape element will be returned to its original location and all fountains and lanterns will become fully operational. In addition, a full time tree preservation contractor has been hired to monitor and care for trees throughout construction.

- **Schedule:** The CVC construction is on pace for completion in spring 2006. Although originally expected to be completed in December 2005, unforeseen site conditions during utility relocation and excavation, design and security changes prompted by the events of 9/11, and the second wettest year on record combined to delay the CVC completion a few months. However, the western half of the East Front Plaza (the roof of the CVC) will still be completed in time to support the inauguration in January of 2005.

- **Budget:** The overall project budget is $421 million. That includes a base budget of $265 million for the core visitor center facility, which includes a new truck tunnel; $70 million for the build-out and finishes of House and Senate expansion space, which together comprise 170,000 square feet; $38.5 million for security enhancements (added after 9/11), and $48 million to accommodate unforeseen site conditions, additional management costs for scope changes, increases in security requirements and additional contingencies.

If you have any questions about the Capitol Visitor Center Project, please contact **Tom Fontana**, CVC Project Communications Officer for the Architect of the Capitol, at **(202) 228-1310**, or by e-mail at: **tfontana@aoc.gov**. For additional information, please visit our web site at www.aoc.gov (click on the "Capitol Visitor Center" link in the project list).

Aerial view of the Capitol Visitor Center project site taken October 1, 2003. The perimeter slurry wall has been completed and more than 90 percent of the soil, nearly 50,000 truckloads, has been removed from the site. Steel erection continues in the northern half of the site followed by installation of roof decking. Crews have begun to pour concrete slabs for the roof deck and the base slab.